

Fleming, Ian - [James Bond]

Quantum Of Solace



calibre 0.9.3

QUANTUM OF SOLACE

James Bond said: "I've always thought that if I ever married I would marry an air hostess."

The dinner party had been rather sticky, and now that the other two guests had left accompanied

by the ADC to catch their plane, the Governor and Bond were sitting together on a chintzy sofa in the

large Office of Works furnished drawing-room, trying to make conversation. Bond had a sharp sense of

the ridiculous. He was never comfortable sitting deep in soft cushions. He preferred to sit up in a

solidly upholstered armchair with his feet firmly on the ground. And he felt foolish sitting with an

elderly bachelor on his bed of rose chintz gazing at the coffee and liqueurs on the low table between

their outstretched feet. There was something clubbable, intimate, even rather feminine, about the scene

and none of these atmospheres was appropriate.

Bond didn't like Nassau. Everyone was too rich. The winter visitors and the residents who had

houses on the island talked of nothing but their money, their diseases and their servant problems. They

didn't even gossip well. There was nothing to gossip about. The winter crowd were all too old to have

love affairs and, like most rich people, too cautious to say anything malicious about their neighbours.

The Harvey Millers the couple that had just left, were typical a pleasant rather dull Canadian

millionaire who had got into Natural Gas early on and stayed with it, and his pretty chatterbox of a

wife. It seemed that she was English. She had sat next to Bond and chattered vivaciously about 'what

shows he had recently seen in town' and 'didn't he think the Savoy Grill was the nicest place for supper.

One saw so many interesting people actresses and people like that'. Bond had done his best, but

since he had not seen a play for two years, and then only because the man he was following in Vienna

had gone to it, he had had to rely on rather dusty memories of London night life which somehow failed

to marry up with the experiences of Mrs Harvey Miller.

Bond knew that the Governor had asked him to dinner only as a duty, and perhaps to help out

with the Harvey Millers. Bond had been in the Colony for a week and was leaving for Miami the next

day. It had been a routine investigation job. Arms were getting to the Castro rebels in Cuba from all the

neighbouring territories. They had been coming principally from Miami and the Gulf of Mexico, but

when the US Coastguards had seized two big shipments, the Castro supporters had turned to Jamaica

and the Bahamas as possible bases, and Bond had been sent out from London to put a stop to it. He

hadn't wanted to do the job. If anything, his sympathies were with the rebels, but the Government had a

big export programme with Cuba in exchange for taking more Cuban sugar than they wanted, and a

minor condition of the deal was that Britain should not give aid or comfort to the Cuban rebels. Bond

had found out about the two big cabin cruisers that were being fitted out for the job, and rather than

make arrests when they were about to sail, thus causing an incident, he had chosen a very dark night

and crept up on the boats in a police launch. From the deck of the unlighted launch he had tossed a

thermite bomb through an open port of each of them. He had then made off at high speed and watched

the bonfire from a distance. Bad luck on the insurance companies, of course, but there were no

casualties and he had achieved quickly and neatly what M had told him to do.

So far as Bond was aware, no one in the Colony, except the Chief of Police and two of his

officers, knew who had caused the two spectacular, and to those in the know timely fires in the

roadstead. Bond had reported only to M in London. He had not wished to embarrass the Governor, who

seemed to him an easily embarrassable man, and it could in fact have been unwise to give him

knowledge of a felony which might easily be the subject of a question in the Legislative Council. But

the Governor was no fool. He had known the purpose of Bond's visit to the Colony, and that evening,

when Bond had shaken him by the hand, the dislike of a peaceable man for violent action had been

communicated to Bond by something constrained and defensive in the Governor's manner.

This had been no help to the dinner party, and it had needed all the chatter and gush of a hard-

working ADC to give the evening the small semblance of life it had achieved.

And now it was only nine-thirty, and the Governor and Bond were faced with one more polite

hour before they could go gratefully to their beds, each relieved that he would never have to see the

other again. Not that Bond had anything against the Governor. He belonged to a routine type that Bond

had often encountered round the world solid, loyal, competent, sober and just: the best type of

Colonial Civil Servant. Solidly, competently, loyally he would have filled the minor posts for thirty

years while the Empire crumbled around him; and now, just in time, by sticking to the ladders and

avoiding the snakes, he had got to the top. In a year or two it would be the GCB and out out to

Godalming, or Cheltenham or Tunbridge Wells with a pension and a small packet of memories of

places like the Trucial Oman, the Leeward Islands, British Guiana, that no one at the local golf club

would have heard of or would care about. And yet, Bond had reflected that evening, how many small

dramas such as the affair of the Castro rebels must the Governor have witnessed or been privy to! How

much he would know about the chequerboard of the small-power politics, the scandalous side of life in

small communities abroad, the secrets of people that lie in the files of Government Houses round the

world. But how could one strike a spark off this rigid, discreet mind? How could he, James Bond,

whom the Governor obviously regarded as a dangerous man and as a possible source of danger to his

own career, extract one ounce of interesting fact or comment to save the evening from being a futile

waste of time?

Bond's careless and slightly mendacious remark about marrying an air hostess had come at the

end of some desultory conversation about air travel that had followed dully, inevitably, on the

departure of the Harvey Millers to catch their plane for Montreal. The Governor had said that BOAC

were getting the lion's share of the American traffic to Nassau because, though their planes might be

half an hour slower from Idlewild, the service was superb. Bond had said, boring himself with his own

banality, that he would rather fly slowly and comfortably than fast and uncosseted. It was then that he

had made the remark about air hostesses.

"Indeed," said the Governor in the polite, controlled voice that Bond prayed might relax and

become human. "Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. It would be fine to have a pretty girl always tucking you up and bringing you

drinks and hot meals and asking if you had everything you wanted. And they're always smiling and

wanting to please. If I don't marry an air hostess, there'll be nothing for it but marry a Japanese. They

seem to have the right ideas too." Bond had no intention of marrying anyone. If he did, it would

certainly not be an insipid slave. He only hoped to amuse or outrage the Governor into a discussion of

some human topic.

"I don't know about the Japanese, but I suppose it has occurred to you that these air hostesses

are only trained to please, that they might be quite different when they're not on the job, so to speak."

The Governor's voice was reasonable, judicious.

"Since I'm not really very interested in getting married, I've never taken the trouble to

investigate."

There was a pause. The Governor's cigar had gone out. He spent a moment or two getting it

going again. When he spoke it seemed to Bond that the even tone had gained a spark of life, of interest.

The Governor said: "There was a man I knew once who must have had the same ideas as you. He fell

in love with an air hostess and married her. Rather an interesting story, as a matter of fact. I suppose,"

the Governor looked sideways at Bond and gave a short self-deprecatory laugh, "you see quite a lot of

the seamy side of life. This story may seem to you on the dull side. But would you care to hear it?"

"Very much." Bond put enthusiasm into his voice. He doubted if the Governor's idea of what

was seamy was the same as his own, but at least it would save him from making any more asinine

conversation. Now to get away from this damnably cloying sofa. He said: "Could I have some more

brandy?" He got up, dashed an inch of brandy into his glass and, instead of going back to the sofa,

pulled up a chair and sat down at an angle from the Governor on the other side of the drink tray.

The Governor examined the end of his cigar, took a quick pull and held the cigar upright so that

the long ash would not fall off. He watched the ash warily throughout his story and spoke as if to the

thin trickle of blue smoke that rose and quickly disappeared in the

hot, moist air.

He said carefully: "This man I'll call him Masters, Philip Masters was almost a

contemporary of mine in the Service. I was a year ahead of him. He went to Fettes and took a

scholarship for Oxford the name of the college doesn't matter and then he applied for the

Colonial Service. He wasn't a particularly clever chap, but he was hard working and capable and the

sort of man who makes a good solid impression on interview boards. They took him into the Service.

His first post was Nigeria. He did well in it. He liked the natives and he got on well with them. He was

a man of liberal ideas and while he didn't actually fraternize, which," the Governor smiled sourly,

"would have got him into trouble with his superiors in those days, he was lenient and humane towards

the Nigerians. It came as quite a surprise to them." The Governor paused and took a pull at his cigar.

The ash was about to fall and he bent carefully over towards the drink tray and let the ash hiss into his

coffee cup. He sat back and for the first time looked across at Bond. He said: "I daresay the affection

this young man had for the natives took the place of the affection young men of that age in other walks

of life have for the opposite sex. Unfortunately Philip Masters was a shy and rather uncouth young man

who had never had any kind of success in that direction. When he hadn't been working to pass his

various exams he had played hockey for his college and rowed in the third eight. In the holidays he had

stayed with an aunt in Wales and climbed with the local mountaineering club. His parents, by the way,

had separated when he was at his public school and, though he was an only child, had not bothered

with him once he was safe at Oxford with his scholarship and a small allowance to see him through. So

he had very little time for girls and very little to recommend him to those he did come across. His

emotional life ran along the frustrated and unhealthy lines that were part of our inheritance from our

Victorian grandfathers. Knowing how it was with him, I am therefore suggesting that his friendly

relations with the coloured people of Nigeria were what is known as a compensation seized on by a

basically warm and full-blooded nature that had been starved of affection and now found it in their

simple kindly natures."

Bond interrupted the rather solemn narrative "The only trouble with beautiful Negresses is that

they don't know anything about birth control. I hope he managed to stay out of that sort of trouble."

The Governor held up his hand. His voice held an undertone of distaste for Bond's earthiness

"No, no. You misunderstand me. I am not talking about sex. It would never have occurred to this young

man to have relations with a coloured girl. In fact he was sadly ignorant of sexual matters. Not a rare

thing even today among young people in England, but very common in those days, and the cause, as I

expect you will agree, of many very many disastrous marriages and other tragedies." Bond

nodded. "No. I am only explaining this young man at some length to show you that what was to come

fell upon a frustrated young innocent with a warm but unawakened heart and body, and a social

clumsiness which made him seek companionship and affection amongst the Negroes instead of in his

own world. He was, in short, a sensitive misfit, physically uninteresting, but in all other respects

healthy and able and a perfectly adequate citizen."

Bond took a sip of his brandy and stretched out his legs. He was enjoying the story. The

Governor was telling it in a rather elderly narrative style which gave it a ring of truth.

The Governor continued: "Young Master's service in Nigeria coincided with the first Labour

Government. If you remember, one of the first things they got down to was a reform of the foreign

services. Nigeria got a new Governor with advanced views on the native problem who was surprised

and pleased to find that he had a junior member of his staff who was already, in his modest sphere,

putting something like the Governor's own views into practice. He encouraged Philip Masters, gave

him duties which were above his rank, and in due course, when Masters was due for a move, he wrote

such a glowing report that Masters jumped a grade and was transferred to Bermuda as Assistant

Secretary to Government."

The Governor looked through his cigar smoke at Bond. He said apologetically: "I hope you

aren't being too bored by all this. I shan't be long in coming to the

point."

"I'm very interested indeed. I think I've got a picture of the man. You must have known him

well."

The Governor hesitated. He said: "I got to know him still better in Bermuda. I was just his

senior and he worked directly under me. However, we haven't quite got to Bermuda yet. It was the

early days of the air services to Africa and, for one reason or another, Philip Masters decided to fly

home to London and so have a longer home leave than if he had taken ship from Freetown. He went by

train to Nairobi and caught the weekly service of Imperial Airways the forerunner of BOAC. He had

never flown before and he was interested but slightly nervous when they took off, after the air hostess,

whom he noticed was very pretty, had given him a sweet to suck and shown him how to fasten his seat-

belt. When the plane had levelled out and he found that flying seemed a more peaceful business than he

had expected, the hostess came back down the almost empty plane. She smiled at him. 'You can undo

the belt now.' When Masters fumbled with the buckle she leant down and undid it for him. It was an

intimate little gesture. Masters had never been so close to a woman of about his own age in his life. He

blushed and felt an extraordinary confusion. He thanked her. She smiled rather saucily at his

embarrassment and sat on the arm of the empty seat across the aisle and asked him where he had come

from and where he was going. He told her. In his turn, he asked her

about the plane and how fast they

were flying and where they would stop, and so forth. He found her very easy to talk to and almost

dazzlingly pretty to look at. He was surprised at her easy way with him and her apparent interest in

what he had to say about Africa. She seemed to think he led a far more exciting and glamorous life

than, to his mind, he did. She made him feel important. When she went away to help the two stewards

prepare lunch, he sat and thought about her and thrilled to his thoughts. When he tried to read he could

not focus on the page. He had to be looking up the plane to catch a glimpse of her. Once she caught his

gaze and gave him what seemed to him a secret smile. We are the only young people on the plane, it

seemed to say. We understand each other. We're interested in the same sort of things."

"Philip Masters gazed out of the window, seeing her in the sea of white clouds below. In his

mind's eye he examined her minutely, marvelling at her perfection. She was small and trim with a milk-

and-roses complexion and fair hair tied in a neat bun. (He particularly liked the bun. It suggested that

she wasn't 'fast'.) She had cherry red smiling lips and blue eyes that sparkled with mischievous fun.

Knowing Wales, he guessed that she had Welsh blood in her, and this was confirmed by her name,

Rhoda Llewellyn, which, when he went to wash his hands before luncheon, he found printed at the

bottom of the crew list above the magazine rack beside the lavatory door. He speculated deeply about

her. She would be near him now for nearly two days, but how could he get to see her again? She must

have hundreds of admirers. She might even be married. Did she fly all the time? How many days off

did she get between trips? Would she laugh at him if he asked her out to dinner and a theatre? Might

she even complain to the captain of the aircraft that one of the passengers was getting fresh? A sudden

vision came to Masters of being turned off the plane at Aden, a complaint to the Colonial Office, his

career ruined."

"Luncheon came, and reassurance. When she fitted the little tray across his knees, her hair

brushed his cheek. Masters felt that he had been touched by a live electric wire. She showed him how

to deal with the complicated little cellophane packages, how to get the plastic lid off the salad dressing.

She told him that the sweet was particularly good a rich layer cake. In short she made a fuss of him,

and Masters couldn't remember when it had ever happened before, even when his mother had looked

after him as a child."

"At the end of the trip, when the sweating Masters had screwed up his courage to ask her out to

dinner, it was almost an anticlimax when she readily agreed. A month later she resigned from Imperial

Airways and they were married. A month after that, Master's leave was up and they took ship for

Bermuda."

Bond said: "I fear the worst. She married him because his life sounded exciting and 'grand'. She

liked the idea of being the belle of the tea parties at Government House. I suppose Masters had to

murder her in the end?"

"No," said the Governor mildly. "But I daresay you're right about why she married him, that and

being tired of the grind and danger of flying. Perhaps she really meant to make a go of it, and certainly

when the young couple arrived and settled into their bungalow on the outskirts of Hamilton we were all

favourably impressed by her vivacity and her pretty face and by the way she made herself pleasant to

everyone. And, of course, Masters was a changed man. Life had become a fairytale for him. Looking

back, it was almost pitiful to watch him try to spruce himself up so that he could live up to her. He took

trouble about his clothes, put some dreadful brilliantine on his hair and even grew a military-type

moustache, presumably because she thought it looked distinguished. At the end of the day, he would

hurry back to the bungalow, and it was always Rhoda this and Rhoda that and when do you think Lady

Burford who was the Governor's wife is going to ask Rhoda to lunch?"

"But he worked hard and everyone liked the young couple, and things went along like a

marriage bell for six months or so. Then, and now I'm only guessing, the occasional word began to

drop like acid in the happy little bungalow. You can imagine the sort of thing: 'Why doesn't the

Colonial Secretary's wife ever take me out shopping with her? How long must we wait before we can

give another cocktail party? You know we can't afford to have a baby. When are you due for

promotion? It's awfully dull here all day with nothing to do. You'll have to get the dinner tonight. I

simply can't be bothered. You have such an interesting time. It's all right for you . . . ' and so on and so

forth. And of course, the cossetting quickly went by the board. Now it was Masters, and of course he

was delighted to do it, who brought the air hostess breakfast in bed before he went off to work. It was

Masters who tidied up the house when he came back in the evening and found cigarette ash and

chocolate papers all over the place. It was Masters who had to give up smoking and his occasional

drink to buy her new clothes so that she could live up to the other wives. Some of this showed, at any

rate to me who knew Masters well in the Secretariat. The preoccupied frown, the occasional enigmatic,

over-solicitous telephone call in office hours, the ten minutes stolen at the end of the day so that he

could take Rhoda to the cinema, and, of course, the occasional half joking questions about marriage in

general: What do other wives do all day long? Do most women find it a bit hot out here? I suppose

women (he almost added 'God bless 'em') are much more easily upset than men. And so forth. The

trouble, or at least most of it, was that Masters was besotted. She was his sun and his moon and if she

was unhappy or restless it was all his fault. He cast about desperately for something that would occupy

her and make her happy, and finally, of all things, he settled or rather they settled together on

golf. Golf is very much the thing in Bermuda. There are several fine links including the famous

Mid-Ocean Club where all the quality play and get together at the club afterwards for gossip and

drinks. It was just what she wanted a smart occupation and high society. God knows how Masters

saved up enough to join and buy her the clubs and the lessons and all the rest, but somehow he did it

and it was a roaring success. She took to spending all day at the Mid-Ocean. She worked hard at her

lessons and got a handicap and met people through the little competitions and the monthly medals, and

in six months she was not only playing a respectable game but had become quite the darling of the men

members. I wasn't surprised. I remember seeing her there from time to time, a delicious, sunburned

little figure in the shortest of shorts with a white eyeshade with a green lining, and a trim compact

swing that flattered her figure, and I can tell you," the Governor twinkled briefly, "she was the prettiest

thing I've ever seen on a golf course. Of course the next step didn't take long. There was a mixed-

foursome competition. She was partnered with the oldest Tattersall boy they're the leading Hamilton

merchants and more or less the ruling clique in Bermudan society. He was a young hellion

handsome as be damned, a beautiful swimmer and a scratch golfer, with an open MG and a speedboat

and all the trimmings. You know the type. Got all the girls he wanted, and, if they didn't sleep with him

pretty quickly, they didn't get the rides in the MG or the Chriscraft or the evenings in the local night

clubs. The couple won the competition after a hard fight in the final and Philip Masters was in the

fashionable crowd round the eighteenth green to cheer them home. That was the last time he cheered

for many a long day, perhaps for all his life. Almost at once she started 'going' with young Tattersall,

and once started she went like the wind. And believe me, Mr Bond" the Governor closed a fist and

brought it softly down on the edge of the drinks table "it was ghastly to see. She didn't make the

smallest attempt to soften the blow or hide the affair in any way. She just took young Tattersall and hit

Masters in the face with him, and went on hitting. She would come home at any hour of the night

she had insisted that Masters should move into the spare room, some pretext about it being too hot to

sleep together and if she ever tidied the house or cooked him a meal it was only makeshift and to

keep up some kind of appearance. Of course, in a month, the whole thing was public property and poor

Masters was wearing the biggest pair of horns that had ever been seen in the Colony. Lady Burford

finally stepped in and gave Rhoda Masters a talking to said she was ruining her husband's career and

so forth But the trouble was that Lady Burford found Masters a pretty dull dog, and having perhaps had

one or two escapades in her own youth she was still a handsome woman with a twinkle in her eye

she was probably a bit too lenient with the girl. Of course Masters himself, as he was to tell me

later, went through the usual dreary sequence remonstrance, bitter quarrel, furious rage, violence (he

told me he damned nearly throttled her one night) and, finally, icy withdrawal and sullen misery." The

Governor paused. "I don't know if you've ever seen a heart being broken, Mr Bond, broken slowly and

deliberately. Well, that's what I saw happening to Philip Masters, and it was a dreadful thing to watch.

There he had been, a man with Paradise in his face, and, within a year of his arrival in Bermuda, Hell

was written all over it. Of course I did my best, we all did in one way or another, but once it had

happened, on that eighteenth green at the Mid-Ocean, there was really nothing to do but try and pick up

the bits. But Masters was like a wounded dog. He just drew away from us into a corner and snarled

when anyone tried to come near him. I even went to the length of writing him one or two letters. He

later told me he had torn them up without reading them. One day, several of us got together and asked

him to a stag party in my bungalow. We tried to get him drunk. We got him drunk all right. The next

thing that happened was a crash from the bathroom. Masters had tried to cut his wrists with my razor.

That broke our nerve and I was deputed to go and see the Governor about the whole business. The

Governor knew about it, of course, but had hoped he wouldn't have to interfere. Now the question was

whether Masters could even stay on in the Service. His work had gone to pieces. His wife was a public

scandal. He was a broken man. Could we stick the bits together again? The Governor was a fine man.

Once action had been forced on him, he was determined to make a last effort to stave off the almost

inevitable report to Whitehall which would finally smash what remained of Masters. And Providence

stepped in to lend a hand. The very next day after my interview with the Governor, there was a dispatch

from the Colonial Office saying there was to be a meeting in Washington to delineate off-shore fishing

rights, and that Bermuda and the Bahamas had been invited to send representatives of their

Governments. The Governor sent for Masters, spoke to him like a Dutch uncle, told him that he was

being sent to Washington, and that he had better have his domestic affairs settled one way or the other

in the next six months, and packed him off. Masters left in a week and sat in Washington talking fish

for five months, and we all heaved a sigh of relief and cut Rhoda Masters whenever we could find an

opportunity to do it."

The Governor stopped speaking and it was silent in the big brightly lit drawing-room. He took

out a handkerchief and wiped it over his face. His memories had excited him and his eyes were bright

in the flushed face. He got to his feet and poured a whisky and soda for Bond, and one for himself.

Bond said: "What a mess. I suppose something like that was bound to happen sooner or later,

but it was bad luck on Masters that it had to happen so soon. She must have been a hard-hearted little

bitch. Did she show any signs of being sorry for what she'd done?"

The Governor had finished lighting a fresh cigar. He looked at the glowing tip and blew on it.

He said: "Oh no. She was having a wonderful time. She probably knew

it wouldn't last for ever, but it

was what she had dreamed about what the readers of women's magazines dream about, and she was

pretty typical of that sort of mentality. She had everything the best catch on the island, love on the

sands under the palm trees, gay times in the town and at the Mid-Ocean, fast drives in the car and the

speedboat all the trappings of cheap romance. And, to fall back on, a slave of a husband well out of

the way, and a house to have a bath in and change her clothes and get some sleep. And she knew she

could get Philip Masters back. He was so abject. There would be no difficulty. And then she could go

round and apologize to everyone and turn on the charm again and everyone would forgive her. It would

be all right. If it wasn't all right, there were plenty of other men in the world besides Philip Masters

and more attractive ones at that. Why, look at all the men at the golf club! She could have her pick of

them at the drop of a hat. No, life was good, and if one was being a bit naughty it was after all only the

way plenty of other people behaved. Look at the way the filmstars went on in Hollywood."

"Well, she was soon put to the test. Tattersall got a bit tired of her and, thanks to the Governor's

wife, the Tattersall parents were making the hell of a fuss. That gave Tattersall a good excuse to get out

of it all without too much of a scene. And it was summer and the island was flooded with pretty

American girls. It was time for some fresh blood. So he chucked Rhoda Masters. Like that. Just told

her they were through. That his parents had insisted or they would cut off his allowance. It was a

fortnight before Philip Masters was due back from Washington, and I will say she took it well. She was

tough and she had known it would have to come some time or other. She didn't squeal. For that matter

there was no one to squeal to. She just went and told Lady Burford that she was sorry and that she was

now going to be a good wife to Philip Masters, and she started on the house and cleaned it up and got

everything shipshape ready for the big reconciliation scene. The necessity for bringing about this

reconciliation was made clear to her by the attitude of her former cronies at the Mid-Ocean. She had

suddenly become bad news there. You know how these things can happen, even in an open-handed

place like a country club in the tropics. Now not only the Government House set but also the Hamilton

merchants clique frowned on her. She was suddenly shoddy goods, used and discarded. She tried to be

the same gay little flirt, but it didn't work any more. She got sharply snubbed once or twice and stopped

going. Now it was vital to get back to a secure base and start slowly working her way up again. She

stayed at home and set to with a will, rehearsing over and over again the act she would put on the

tears, the air hostess cossetting, the lengthy, sincere excuses and explanations, the double bed."

"And then Philip Masters came home."

The Governor paused and looked reflectively over at Bond. He said: "You're not married, but I

think it's the same with all relationships between a man and a woman. They can survive anything so

long as some kind of basic humanity exists between the two people. When all kindness has gone, when

one person obviously and sincerely doesn't care if the other is alive or dead, then it's just no good. That

particular insult to the ego worse, to the instinct of self-preservation can never be forgiven. I've

noticed this in hundreds of marriages. I've seen flagrant infidelities patched up, I've seen crimes and

even murder forgiven by the other party, let alone bankruptcy and every other form of social crime.

Incurable disease, blindness, disaster all these can be overcome. But never the death of common

humanity in one of the partners. I've thought about this and I've invented a rather high-sounding title

for this basic factor in human relations. I have called it the Law of the Quantum of Solace."

Bond said: "That's a splendid name for it. It's certainly impressive enough. And of course I see

what you mean. I should say you're absolutely right. Quantum of Solace the amount of comfort.

Yes, I suppose you could say that all love and friendship is based in the end on that. Human beings are

very insecure. When the other person not only makes you feel insecure but actually seems to want to

destroy you, it's obviously the end. The Quantum of Solace stands at zero. You've got to get away to

save yourself. Did Masters see that?" The Governor didn't answer the question. He said: "Rhoda

Masters should have been warned when her husband walked through the bungalow door. It wasn't so

much what she saw on the surface though the moustache had gone and Masters's hair was once

again the untidy mop of their first meeting it was the eyes and the mouth and the set of the chin.

Rhoda Masters had put on her quietest frock. She had taken off most of her make-up and had arranged

herself in a chair where the light from the window left her face in half shadow and illuminated the

pages of a book on her lap. She had decided that, when he came through the door, she would look up

from her book, docilely, submissively, and wait for him to speak. Then she would get up and come

quietly to him and stand in front of him with her head bowed. She would tell him all and let the tears

come and he would take her in his arms and she would promise and promise. She had practised the

scene many times until she was satisfied."

"She duly glanced up from her book. Masters quietly put down his suitcase and walked slowly

over to the mantelpiece and stood looking vaguely down at her. His eyes were cold and impersonal and

without interest. He put his hand in his inside pocket and took out a piece of paper. He said in the

matter-of-fact voice of a house agent: 'Here is a plan of the house. I have divided the house in two.

Your rooms are the kitchen and your bedroom. Mine are this room and the spare bedroom. You may

use the bathroom when I am not in it.' He leant over and dropped the paper on the open pages of her

book. 'You are never to enter my rooms except when we have friends in.' Rhoda Masters opened her

mouth to speak. He held up his hand. "This is the last time I shall speak to you in private. If you speak

to me, I shall not answer. If you wish to communicate, you may leave a note in the bathroom. I shall

expect my meals to be prepared punctually and placed in the dining-room, which you may use when I

have finished. I shall give you twenty pounds a month to cover the housekeeping, and this amount will

be sent to you by my lawyers on the first of each month. My lawyers are preparing the divorce papers. I

am divorcing you, and you will not fight the action because you cannot. A private detective has

provided full evidence against you. The action will take place in one year from now when my time in

Bermuda is up. In the meantime, in public, we shall behave as a normal married couple."

"Masters put his hands in his pockets and looked politely down at her. By this time tears were

pouring down her face. She looked terrified as if someone had hit her. Masters said indifferently: 'Is

there anything else you'd like to know? If not, you had better collect your belongings from here and

move into the kitchen.' He looked at his watch. 'I would like dinner every evening at eight. It is now

seven-thirty."

The Governor paused and sipped his whisky. He said: "I've put all this together from the little

that Masters told me and from fuller details Rhoda Masters gave to Lady Burford. Apparently Rhoda

Masters tried every way to shake him arguments, pleadings, hysterics. He was unmoved. She simply

couldn't reach him. It was as if he had gone away and had sent someone else to the house to represent

him at this extraordinary interview. And in the end she had to agree. She had no money. She couldn't

possibly afford the passage to England. To have a bed and food she had to do what he told her. And so

it was. For a year they lived like that, polite to each other in public, but utterly silent and separate when

they were alone. Of course, we were all astonished by the change. Neither of them told anyone of the

arrangement. She would have been ashamed to do so and there was no reason why Masters should. He

seemed to us a bit more withdrawn than before, but his work was first-class and everyone heaved a sigh

of relief and agreed that by some miracle the marriage had been saved. Both of them gained great credit

from the fact, and they became a popular couple with everything forgiven and forgotten."

"The year passed and it was time for Masters to go. He announced that Rhoda would stay

behind to close the house, and they went through the usual round of farewell parties. We were a bit

surprised that she didn't come to see him off in the ship, but he said she wasn't feeling well. So that was

that until, in a couple of weeks, news of the divorce case began leaking back from England. Then

Rhoda Masters turned up at Government House and had a long interview with Lady Burford, and

gradually the whole story, including its really terrible next chapter, leaked out."

The Governor swallowed the last of his whisky. The ice made a hollow rattle as he put the glass

softly down. He said: "Apparently on the day before Masters left he found a note from his wife in the

bathroom. It said that she simply must see him for one last talk before he left her for ever. There had

been notes like this before and Masters had always torn them up and left the bits on the shelf above the

basin. This time he scribbled a note giving her an appointment in the sitting-room at six o'clock that

evening. When the time arrived, Rhoda Masters came meekly in from the kitchen. She had long since

given up making emotional scenes or trying to throw herself on his mercy. Now she just quietly stood

and said that she had only ten pounds left from that month's housekeeping money and nothing else in

the world. When he left she would be destitute."

"You have the jewels I gave you, and the fur cape."

"I'd be lucky if I got fifty pounds for them."

"You'll have to get some work."

"It'll take time to find something. I've got to live somewhere. I have to be out of the house in a

fortnight. Won't you give me anything at all? I shall starve."

"Masters looked at her dispassionately. 'You're pretty. You'll never starve.'"

"You must help me, Philip. You must. It won't help your career having me begging at

Government House."

"Nothing in the house belonged to them except a few odds and ends. They had taken it

furnished. The owner had come the week before and agreed the inventory. There only remained their

car, a Morris that Masters had bought second hand, and a radiogramophone he had bought as a last

resort to try and keep his wife amused before she took up golf."

"Philip Masters looked at her for the last time He was never to see her again. He said: 'All right.

You can have the car and the radiogram. Now that's all. I've got to pack. Goodbye.' And he walked out

of the door and up to his room."

The Governor looked across at Bond. "At least one last little gesture. Yes?" The Governor

smiled grimly. "When he had gone and Rhoda Masters was left alone, she took the car and her

engagement ring and her few trinkets and the fox fur tippet and went into Hamilton and drove round

the pawnbrokers. In the end she collected forty pounds for the jewellery and seven pounds for the bit of

fur. Then she went to the car dealers whose nameplate was on the dashboard of the car and asked to see

the manager. When she asked how much he would give her for the Morris he thought she was pulling

his leg. 'But, madam, Mr Masters bought the car by hire purchase and he's very badly behind on his

payments. Surely he told you that we had to send him a solicitor's letter about it only a week ago. We

heard he was leaving. He wrote back that you would be coming in to make the necessary arrangements.

Let me see' he reached for a file and leafed through it. 'Yes, there's exactly two hundred pounds

owing on the car.'"

"Well, of course, Rhoda Masters burst into tears and in the end the manager agreed to take back

the car, although it wasn't worth two hundred pounds by then, but he insisted that she should leave it

with him then and there, petrol in the tank and all. Rhoda Masters could only accept and be grateful not

to be sued, and she walked out of the garage and along the hot street and already she knew what she

was going to find when she got to the radio shop. And she was right. It was the same story, only this

time she had to pay ten pounds to persuade the man to take back the radiogram. She got a lift back to

within walking distance of the bungalow and went and threw herself down on the bed and cried for the

rest of the day. She had already been a beaten woman. Now Philip Masters had kicked her when she

was down."

The Governor paused. "Pretty extraordinary, really. A man like Masters, kindly, sensitive, who

wouldn't normally hurt a fly. And here he was performing one of the cruellest actions I can recall in all

my experience. It was my law operating." The Governor smiled thinly. "Whatever her sins, if she had

given him that Quantum of Solace he could never have behaved to her as he did. As it was, she had

awakened in him a bestial cruelty a cruelty that perhaps lies deeply hidden in all of us and that only

a threat to our existence can bring to the surface. Masters wanted to make the girl suffer, not as much as

he had suffered because that was impossible, but as much as he could possibly contrive. And that false

gesture with the motor car and the radiogramophone was a fiendishly brilliant bit of delayed action to

remind her, even when he was gone, how much he hated her, how much he wanted still to hurt her."

Bond said: "It must have been a shattering experience. It's extraordinary how much people can

hurt each other. I'm beginning to feel rather sorry for the girl. What happened to her in the end and

to him, for the matter of that?"

The Governor got to his feet and looked at his watch. "Good heavens, it's nearly midnight. And

I've been keeping the staff up all this time," he smiled, "as well as you." He walked across to the

fireplace and rang a bell. A Negro butler appeared. The Governor apologized for keeping him up and

told him to lock up and turn the light out. Bond was on his feet. The Governor turned to him. "Come

along and I'll tell you the rest. I'll walk through the garden with you and see that the sentry lets you

out."

They walked slowly through the long rooms and down the broad steps to the garden. It was a

beautiful night under a full moon that raced over their heads through the thin high clouds.

The Governor said: "Masters went on in the Service but somehow he never lived up to his good

start. After the Bermuda business something seemed to go out of him. Part of him had been killed by

the experience. He was a maimed man. Mostly her fault, of course, but I guess that what he did to her

lived on with him and perhaps haunted him. He was good at his work, but he had somehow lost the

human touch and he gradually dried up. Of course he never married

again and in the end he got shunted

off into the ground nuts scheme, and when that was a failure he retired and went to live in Nigeria

back to the only people in the world who had shown him any kindness back to where it had all

started from. Bit tragic, really, when I remember what he was like when we were young."

"And the girl?"

"Oh, she went through a pretty bad time. We handed round the hat for her and she pottered in

and out of various jobs that were more or less charity. She tried to go back to being an air hostess, but

the way she had broken her contract with Imperial Airways put her out of the running for that. There

weren't so many airlines in those days and there was no shortage of applicants for the few hostess jobs

that were going. The Burfords got transferred to Jamaica later in that same year and that removed her

main prop. As I said. Lady Burford had always had a soft spot for her. Rhoda Masters was pretty nearly

destitute. She still had her looks and various men had kept her for a while; but you can't make the

rounds for very long in a small place like Bermuda, and she was very near to becoming a harlot and

getting into trouble with the police when Providence again stepped in and decided she had been

punished enough. A letter came from Lady Burford enclosing her fare to Jamaica and saying she had

got her a job as receptionist at the Blue Hills Hotel, one of the best of the Kingston hotels. So she left,

and I expect I'd been transferred to Rhodesia by then that Bermuda

was heartily relieved to see

the last of her."

The Governor and Bond had come to the wide entrance gates to the grounds of Government

House. Beyond them shone, white and black and pink under the moon, the huddle of narrow streets and

pretty clapboard houses with gingerbread gables and balconies that is Nassau. With a terrific clatter the

sentry came to attention and presented arms. The Governor raised a hand: "All right. Stand at ease."

Again the clockwork sentry rattled briefly into life and there was silence.

The Governor said: "And that's the end of the story except for one final quirk of fate. One day a

Canadian millionaire turned up at the Blue Hills Hotel and stayed for the winter. At the end of the time

he took Rhoda Masters back to Canada and married her. She's lived in clover ever since."

"Good heavens. That was a stroke of luck. Hardly deserved it."

"I suppose not. One can't tell. Life's a devious business. Perhaps, for all the harm she'd done to

Masters, Fate decided that she had paid back enough. Perhaps Masters's father and mother were the

true guilty people. They turned Masters into an accident-prone man. Inevitably he was involved in the

emotional crash that was due to him and that they had conditioned him for. Fate had chosen Rhoda for

its instrument. Now Fate reimbursed her for her services. Difficult to judge these things. Anyway, she

made her Canadian very happy. I thought they both seemed happy tonight."

Bond laughed. Suddenly the violent dramatics of his own life seemed very hollow. The affair of

the Castro rebels and the burned out yachts was the stuff of an adventure-strip in a cheap newspaper.

He had sat next to a dull woman at a dull dinner party and a chance remark had opened for him the

book of real violence of the Comédie Humaine where human passions are raw and real, where Fate

plays a more authentic game than any Secret Service conspiracy devised by Governments.

Bond faced the Governor and held out his hand. He said: "Thank you for the story. And I owe

you an apology. I found Mrs Harvey Miller a bore. Thanks to you I shall never forget her. I must pay

more attention to people. You've taught me a lesson."

They shook hands. The Governor smiled. "I'm glad the story interested you. I was afraid you

might be bored. You lead a very exciting life. To tell you the truth, I was at my wit's end to know what

we could talk about after dinner. Life in the Colonial Service is very humdrum."

They said goodnight. Bond walked off down the quiet street towards the harbour and the British

Colonial Hotel. He reflected on the conference he would be having in the morning with the

Coastguards and the FBI in Miami. The prospect, which had previously interested, even excited him,

was now edged with boredom and futility.